Conclusion of the Sales Year 2022

13 January 2023, Salesian Spirituality Days: Day 1

*Ivo Coelho, SDB General Councillor for Formation*

We are at the end of a very fruitful Year dedicated to our patron, St Francis de Sales. The Year began with the **Strenna** of the Rector Major, "Do everything out of love and nothing by constraint," along with the inauguration of the yearlong **exhibition** on Francis de Sales at the Casa Museo Don Bosco, with precious artefacts not only from our own collections but also from those of the Visitation.

Our special gratitude to don Michele Molinar and his team for the series of **videos** on our saint, and to don Silvio Roggia and all those who collaborated with him to make these available to the Salesian Family in five languages. To all our authors who have published **books**, too, a word of thanks.

Several groups made **pilgrimages and spiritual retreats** in Annecy, and here we must include the one made by the Rector Major and his council under the guidance of don Morand Wirth.

Surely one of the highlights of the Year was the **International Congress on St Francis de Sales** held at the UPS, 18-20 November 2022, with the participation of some 14 different congregations, institutes and associations inspired by Francis de Sales. It was a beautiful moment of communion around our common patrimony, and also a historical moment, being the very first time that such a gathering had become possible in the last 400 years. Especially impressive was the way the Salesian pedagogy of grace and freedom kept coming up in different interventions.

Finally, **Pope Francis** gave us, as promised, the gift of his beautiful apostolic letter *Totum amoris est*, on the 4th centenary of the death of our saint. Once again we find in it a reflection on the method of Francis de Sales, one that “renounced all harshness and respected completely the dignity and gits of a devout soul,” a method rooted in the way of God himself with us, God who draws us not by “chains of iron” but by “invitations, enticements and holy inspirations.” A method that has left a lasting mark on the history of spirituality and of education – as in the case of our own Don Bosco who the Pope in his goodness mentions.

Though the Year dedicated to our patron is drawing to a close, the invitation to enter deeper into his patrimony and to make it our own continues to be actual and relevant. The love of God reaches beyond differences of social level and cultural preparation to bear fruit in multiform ways. If Francis could break through the most difficult barriers and prejudices by means of his patience and gentleness, so can we in our own time. Everything pertains to love.

We thank God for the gift of our great patron and for the continued apostolic fruitfulness of his life and work.

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